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Naval Hospital Bremerton promotes March National Nutrition Month

BY VJOHNSON – MARCH 10, 2014

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Taking the opportunity to reach for taste as well as nutrition is not beyond anyone's outstretched arms.

Naval Hospital Bremerton's Nutrition Management team is out to educate, convince and remind everyone that the theme "Enjoy the Taste of Eating Right" for March as National Nutrition Month® 2014 is not just a temporary proposal.



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It’s a permanent motto for staff members and beneficiaries to live by.

According to Cmdr. Kim Zuzelski, NHB Nutrition Management head, a person’s eating habits are more than just ‘eating this and not eating that;’ it’s more about knowing what foods offer the best nutritional choices and what foods a person to enjoy in moderation.

“It seems cliché to say that eating well is a lifestyle, but that is the message we want to convey. It is certainly more than a black list of foods to avoid, as I’m a firm believer that all foods can fit into a healthy diet. Once people are educated about nutrition, they are equipped to make informed decisions about what, how much, and how often they eat. We aim to identify barriers to healthy eating, which may be a basic lack of knowledge, but may also be present due to social or psychological issues that need to be addressed before someone can truly be successful in reaching their goals,” said Zuzelski.

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics National Nutrition Month® 2014 “Enjoy the Taste of Eating Right” theme is based upon consumer research that taste trumps nutrition as the main reason why one food is purchased over another. While social, emotional and health factors also play a role, the foods people enjoy are likely the ones they eat the most.

The “Enjoy the Taste of Eating Right” premise focuses on how to combine taste and nutrition to create healthy meals that follow Dietary Guideline such as consuming more of certain foods and nutrients like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fat-free and low-fat dairy products, as well as consuming fewer foods with sodium (salt), saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, added sugar and refined grains.

Zuzelski noticed that eating right is really less about dieting and more about behavioral modification.



Navy Nutritionists and Dietitians attest that adding a little color from fruits and vegetables – low in calories, packed with vitamin and nutrients – is a good visual reminder of healthy eating. A variety is encouraged because there isn’t any one food that offer all the needed nutrients. Fruits and vegetables have a combination of vitamins and nutrients and the various colors all bring different health benefits and have different roles in promoting a healthy immune and circulatory system.

“While some people think eating less is the solution to weight management, they may find that they can actually eat more if they make different choices. Being mindful of habits and the

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eating environment can also influence healthy eating,” said Zuzelski, who along with the rest of the registered dietitians on the command’s Nutrition Management team – Susan Yake and Jennifer Meeks at NHB and Cheryl Decker at Naval Branch Health Clinic Everett – are doing their part to share their knowledge and experience on choosing healthy, and in some cases a healthier balance, of foods instead of ‘fast-food’ fare.

“There are more healthy food choices available at fast-food places than there have been in the past. However many people aren’t ordering the healthy options when they go to those places. Many people still skip meals and then have a tendency to choose less healthy items and overeat at the next meal. Prior planning goes a long way. There are numerous healthy options that travel well, and we know that the majority of people who are successful at weight loss and maintaining that loss do not skip breakfast. Taking a few extra minutes on a weekend or the night before at home to pre-portion snacks or meals can save a lot of money and drastically improve the quality of one’s diet,” exclaimed Zuzelski.

Zuzelski also attests that a variety of foods is encouraged because there isn’t any one food that offers all the needed nutrients. Fruits and vegetables have a combination of vitamins and nutrients that cannot be replicated in a supplement and the various colors all confer different health benefits and have different roles in promoting a healthy immune and circulatory system.

The advantages of healthful eating – A variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein and dairy products – go well beyond simply losing unneeded pounds.

“Although many consider weight management as a primary benefit to healthful eating, benefits also include healthy skin and hair, reduced risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, certain cancers, and cardiovascular disease,” stated Zuzelski, adding that for someone to eat healthy, it depends on their current dietary habits and how willing they are to make some changes.

“Some find that they actually have a preference for healthier foods, but their lack of planning puts them in a situation where there aren’t a lot of healthy choices in their immediate surroundings. Planning can make a big difference in availability of healthy foods. Others have eaten convenience foods for years, and it’s a difficult transition to add foods that they haven’t traditionally had in their homes,” said Zuzelski.

The Nutrition Management team also runs into common hurdles that a number of patients have when it comes to modifying their eating habits.

“People will often ask for a menu or list of what they should eat, rather than investing the time to educate themselves. Although it may save time initially, it’s not helpful in the long run as that menu is very limiting, becomes very boring, and doesn’t teach any life skills on how to choose food. We have to eat until the day we die, so I think it’s well worth the investment to have a good understanding of how to do it in a healthful way that is still enjoyable. We are still fascinated by marketing of various diets and supplements to lose weight fast. I’ve never argued that people can lose weight fast on a myriad of methods found on the internet, however, losing weight fast also means losing additional lean mass and water weight that is quickly regained,” Zuzelski explained, noting that maintaining lean mass (muscle) while losing a higher proportion of excess weight as fat allows someone to eat more calories each day without gaining weight.

NHB offers several avenues to educate beneficiaries on nutrition. The Nutrition Clinic holds classes on basic nutrition, prenatal nutrition, irritable bowel syndrome, and carbohydrate counting for those with pre-diabetes or diabetes. Additionally, the registered dietitians are available to teach classes to individual units or work centers upon request and also see patients on an individual basis to work with them on meeting individual goals. Although a consult is

typically required from the primary care manager for the Nutrition Clinic, active duty personnel do not require a consult to be seen for weight management and can book directly through the TRICARE regional appointment center (1-800-404-4506).

NHB’s Health Promotion and Wellness department also supports Nutrition Management efforts and offers a Healthy Shopping commissary tour, as well as a class on diabetes prevention.


“In the past, some people really underestimated the profound impact that nutrition has on health and quality of life. They have learned that nutrition is important for more than weight control. There are many people who are at a healthy weight, but deficient in various nutrients and have a diet that increases health risks or exacerbates other health conditions,” Zuzelski said.

Zuzelski has had several patients who struggled with weight loss despite a good effort to eat healthier. One patient had diabetes while she was pregnant and had a strong family history of obesity and diabetes. Zuzelski worked with her to follow a meal plan similar to someone with diabetes and discussed diabetes prevention through permanent lifestyle changes. The patient was able to safely lose the weight she needed to pass her weigh in.

“It was extremely rewarding to see her reach her goal and now have the knowledge she needs to maintain her loss. I had another patient a couple years ago who had chronic kidney failure and was feeling tired much of the time. She also complained of how food tasted and that she had tingling in her fingers at times. After meeting with her, we identified deficiencies of vitamin D, B12, zinc, and iron. Once treated, her symptoms resolved, she was able to start exercising again, and her quality of life drastically improved,” said Zuzelski.

The incentive for some is preparing for the semi-annual Physical Readiness Test. For others, it’s a lifestyle transformation of continuing on a New Year’s Resolution, one meal at a time. Zuzelski and her expert team are there to provide as much assistance as necessary.

“I love providing people the education and tools to make healthy choices that they didn’t have before we met. Helping people understand that they have a lot of control over their health outcomes through the choices they make on a daily basis is very rewarding,” Zuzelski said.



About vjohnson